RE: LETTER OF SUPPORT FOR H.B. No. 5364 (COMM) AN ACT DESIGNATING THE SHORELINE OF THE TOWN OF STRATFORD AS A “NO KILL OR HARVEST ZONE” FOR HORSESHOE CRABS

Major Reasons Why this is a Good Bill to Pass:

I and my colleagues have studied the ecology of the Long Island Sound (LIS) population of horseshoe crabs (*Limulus polyphemus*) for over 18 years and we support and encourage the passing of the proposed House Bill No. 5364, *An Act Designating the Shoreline of the Town of Stratford as a “No Kill or Harvest Zone” for Horseshoe Crabs*.

1) The average density of spawning female horseshoe crabs across the beaches of Connecticut is very low ~0.001/m², several orders of magnitude less than what is found in Delaware Bay.

2) Preventing the harvest of adult horseshoe crabs at Short Beach and Stratford Point will connect with the No Harvest Zone at Milford Point and allow adult crabs to spawn in a continuous protected area that will generally have a positive effect on the horseshoe crab population and eventually the shorebird populations.

3) Mattei and colleagues have published research demonstrating horseshoe crab spawning densities are so low that very few if any eggs are available for the shorebird population to consume¹.

4) The population is aging (based on shell condition) with low numbers of new adults entering the population. Survival of juvenile horseshoe crabs is very low (less than 1 in 100,000). If more adult females are allowed to spawn and are protected from harvest then more juveniles may survive the 10 years of development to adult spawning age².
5) The Atlantic States Fisheries Commission commented in its annual report that due to the tight harvest restrictions of the mid-Atlantic States, more harvest pressure (illegal and legal) will be placed on the horseshoe populations in New York and Connecticut. The current harvest restrictions in DE and NJ do not allow any harvest from May 1 – June 7. This allows the majority of females to spawn before they are harvested.

6) Protecting spawning females is the best practice for increasing the horseshoe crab population for both shorebirds and fishermen\(^3\).

7) We understand the importance of the horseshoe crab harvest to the livelihood of fisherman and that these animals are the best bait for eel and whelk. The harvest may continue on other beaches, just not in the Housatonic Estuary.

8) The State of Connecticut does have three no harvest zones, Milford Point, Sandy Point West Haven and Menunketesuck Island. We surveyed the Island last year and no spawning crabs were found there. It was established as a no harvest zone because it is a bird nesting area not for protecting the horseshoe crab population.

9) The LIS horseshoe crab population is reproducing well below its maximum level and a Stratford Sanctuary will allow for better survival and expansion of our local population.

10) Since many areas of our CT coastline are eroding and the quality of habitat is declining, we should try to preserve what natural areas we have for future generations\(^4\) including horseshoe crab spawning areas\(^4\).

11) Many Stratford citizens have learned about the ecology of Long Island Sound through tagging activities with Project *Limulus* and are now interested in conservation and protection of our natural resources. This bill will help to get more people involved and help protect our renewable natural resources like horseshoe crabs and all of the species that are interconnected with their population.

**References:**


Sincerely yours,

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